

CHRIST'S PRIVATE LIFE.

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The private life of Christ at Nazareth—the place where Joseph and Mary resided, and where, as one of the Evangelists says, “he had been brought up”—preceded his public ministry, and, covering a period of about thirty years, embraced far the larger portion of his earthly life. Luke is the only evangelist that makes any mention of this period; and what he says consists in two general statements, and the recital of an incident that occurred at Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old.

The general statements are the following: “And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.” “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.” This language relates to Christ considered with reference to his humanity. His body, with the advance of years, like any other human body, grew and increased in stature. So, also, his human spirit increased in strength and power. He was filled with wisdom; God’s grace was upon him; and he increased in favor with God and man.

All this implies that Jesus, before his public ministry began, had a marked character of great excellence and purity, as well as wisdom, commending him alike to God and man. The Bible assigns to him a character of sinless perfection. He could, hence, say to the Jews: “Which of you convinceth me of sin?” Paul tells us that he “who knew no sin,” was made a sin-offering for us “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” In the Epistle to the Hebrews it is said that he was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the Heavens,” and did not, therefore, need, as was the fact with the Jewish high priests, “to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s.” Though he was “in all points tempted like as we are,” he was, nevertheless, “without sin.” These statements cover the whole period of Christ’s life on earth; and hence we have in him a sinless child and a sinless man—a perfect moral being from the manger to the cross.

The special incident to which Luke refers, occurred at Jerusalem, whither Joseph and Mary had gone, with the child Jesus, then twelve years of age, to attend the feast of the passover. When they departed on their return to Nazareth, “Jesus tarried in Jerusalem,” which fact they did not discover until they had gone a day’s journey. Immediately retracing their steps, “they found him in the temple, sit-

ting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.” His mother said to him: “Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” To this he responded: “How is it that ye have sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” Luke says that they did not understand the saying which he spake unto them,” and adds that “he went down with them,” and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.”

Two things lie upon the face of this narrative. One is that Jesus, even at the early age of twelve years, evinced an understanding far in advance of such an age, so much so as to excite the astonishment of all who heard him. Equally apparent is it that he then had a conception of the nature and purpose of his mission to this world. He speaks of his “Father’s business,” and of the necessity imposed upon him that he should “be about” that “business.” The “business” referred to was nothing less than the introduction, establishment, execution, and final consummation of God’s great plan of grace for the salvation of sinners through this very Jesus. His words imply that, even at that age, he understood himself to be in this world, as the agent and messenger of God in respect to this “business.”

Curiosity has often inquired why, with the two exceptions mentioned by Luke, the Gospel narrative should be silent in respect to the whole period of Christ’s private life at Nazareth. We have a similar fact in the case of John the Baptist, of whom nothing is said in respect to the period between his infancy and the time when the word of the Lord summoned him to the work assigned to him as forerunner of Christ. The New Testament, in neither case, gives any direct answer as to the reason for its omission to record the facts in regard to Christ or John the Baptist during this intermediate period. It treats the matter as wholly immaterial to the purpose of the Gospel narrative. That purpose was not to set before mankind the life of Christ, as a private person resident at Nazareth, known only to a comparatively small circle, and hence, as compared with his public life, a life of retirement. This narrative was intended to be a record of Christ’s public ministry, and not his prior residence at Nazareth, or the facts connected therewith, that supplies the materials for a record.

It should be noted also that the Evangelists do not attempt to give an exhaustive history even of Christ’s public ministry. He wrought miracles, and some of these miracles are described in the details thereof, as to their nature, the persons on

whom wrought, and various attending circumstances; and yet the miracles not thus described, but simply referred to in general terms, were far greater in number. So, also, his sayings are reported in the Gospel narrative, but by no means the whole of them. He is often spoken of as preaching in the villages of Galilee and Judea, and in Jerusalem, without any statement of what he said. The actual facts are larger in quantity than the recorded facts of his public ministry.

John, in his Gospel, which records many of the sayings and some of the miracles of Christ, says with reference to what he had written: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.” This language is equally applicable to any of the Gospels, and, indeed, to all of them taken as an aggregate. They do not claim to tell absolutely and perfectly the whole story, in all its details, of Christ’s public life. They give enough for the practical purpose of guidance and salvation. Such being the character and purpose of these narratives, it need not excite our surprise that they do not describe the life of Christ when resident at Nazareth and before the commencement of his public ministry. There was no occasion for such a record, and with the exception of what Luke says, none was made.

There was, however, nothing in the residence of Jesus at Nazareth that can, on any human basis, explain his marvelous record when he suddenly burst upon the Jewish nation as the most wonderful character that ever appeared in our world. He instantly became the great historic phenomenon of all the ages, without parallel in the past or in the future, and for this there is no rational account to be given unless we assume the reality of those supernatural and divine elements which he claimed for himself, and which the apostles claimed for him after his ascension into heaven. This solves the problem of the historic Jesus, and nothing else does. Accept his story, and all is simple. Reject it, and all is the deepest and densest mystery.

Religion cannot pass away. The burning of a little straw may hide the stars of the sky; but the stars are there and will reappear.—*Carlyle*.

To him no chance is lost;
He always wins who sides with God;
God’s will is sweetest to him when
It triumphs at his cost.—*Faber*.